

THE ISLAND OF THE STAIRS

Being a True Account of Certain Strange and Wonderful Adventures of Master John Hampdon, Seaman, and Mistress Lucy Wilberforce, Gentlewoman, in the Great South Sea.

By
CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

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"For God's sake, Mistress Lucy," I cried, "but this time she was gone. I heard the door of her cabin shut violently. There was no help for it. Well, I must devise some way to find out for myself. The cabin was lighted by an air port closed by a dowsy. I measured it, drew back the thick glass and examined the opening. I knew it was a false proposition. A slender boy might have slipped through, but not a man such as I. My mighty thighs and sinews and great bulk required a door, and no small one either.

The wind ceased blowing hard outside, and some spray came in through the port as the waves slipped the side of the ship. I closed and secured it. There was nothing to be gained there. I must seek some other way. I was not weaponless. Nobody had thought to search the cabin, and a brace of pistols which I always kept handy and ready for an emergency

were locked securely in my chest. My finger hung at the side of my berth. The door was a strong one. It was locked, and barred without. I might have broken it down; I could have done so if I had had space enough in which to run and hurl myself against it. I might even have kicked it to pieces with my heavy seaman's boot. Certainly I could easily have blown the lock off with my pistol, but any of these endeavors would have roused the ship.

I had one other hope. If Captain Matthews should come to the cabin I would appeal to him. For the rest I determined not to sleep that night. Some strange foreboding possessed me. We were near the latitude and longitude of the island we were seeking. If indeed there were such an island as was thought to be, and I reasoned that the men would argue now and it would be a good time for an outbreak, especially since I was removed. Would it come that night? Would it come at all? Was I mistaken in the men?

I have often wondered why women were made, and since they were made, why men should be such fools about them. Here I was helpless just because I had snatched a kiss from one of them. I am in the mood for confession. I might as well say that I fully rejoiced in that kiss.

Well, whatever happened, I had the memory of that kiss. She would never forgive me. Of course there was absolutely no hope that she would return my suit, even in her poverty. She was not for such as I, and if there was anything in this old buccaner's parchment, if there was an island and if she did get the treasure, why, the world would be at her feet again. And I, like the fool I was, was helping her to get it, to bring it about. I was mad, ay, mad, with impotent helplessness that night.

I sat there in the dark, no light being vouchsafed to me, and the lights in the outer cabin not having been lighted for a long time. The wind rose and rose. The ship was pitching madly. My room was on the starboard side of the cabin, and presently I heard all hands called to reef the topsails. Captain Matthews was alert and ready.

of course. Presently he put the ship about, and with the canvas off of her she was steered. There did not seem to be any special danger in the weather, and for that I was thankful.

I must have dozed. I was awakened by the last echoing of the bell forward. I didn't know what time it was, because I didn't know whether I had heard it begin to strike, but I could count three couples, which meant that it was 11 o'clock at least. I didn't know, of course, that it was eight bells, midnight, until the voice of the boat-swain came to me through the bulkhead that separated the cabin from the quarterdeck.

"A—s—all the port watch!" I could hear the men below grumbling and cursing as they turned out. They had evidently been sent below to the hammocks after the topsails had been reefed for a couple of hours. I could hear scraps of conversation.

"Now!"

"Kill him!"

"This is the best time!"

"The old man's alone!"

What I heard filled me with dismay. I picked up the pistol and pointed it at the lock in the door. I had made up my mind, come what might, to blow off the lock and get free. Before I could press the trigger I heard a call on the deck above me, a shot, a rush of feet, a scuffle, a groan, a fall!

CHAPTER VII.

Wherein I Bargain For a Woman.

WHAT had happened I could not tell. Captain Matthews had been attacked. He had promptly shot one of the mutineers, and thereafter the rest had got him. My first impulse was to blow open the lock of the door and rush to his rescue, but wiser counsel prevailed, and I did nothing. I am, I think, somewhat cool headed in a crisis, and surely this was one. I could wait. A loaded pistol was better than an empty one, and to deal with me they would have to come to me for whatever purpose they might entertain, either to murder me or to release me. In either event I could do more than if I rushed into the fray now. I could not help Captain Matthews. I was sure that whatever fell purpose they might entertain for my little mistress would be in abeyance until they had settled with me.

I listened with every nerve strained to the utmost. I also waited most anxiously for the opening of the after-cabin door, which was her own, but



"The first man," I hissed out, "gets a bullet."

she must have been in a sound sleep. Indeed, for the door did not open. Evidently she had heard nothing. I waited. It was not an easy task, but I judged it best.

Fortunately I had not long to wait, for in less time by far than I have taken to tell it the hatch was opened and the heavy booted men clattered down the companionway. The key was in the lock outside, and I could hear them turn it. I loosened my sword, which I had slung by its belt around my waist, picked up the two pistols, sent my back up against the side of the ship and made ready for whatever came.

The door was pushed open abruptly, and I saw the cabin was crowded with men. At least half the crew were gathered there, and it was a little cabin, the Rose of Devon being but a small ship. The rest, I guessed, were on watch. I could not see the boat-swain. Evidently he had the deck. The vessel couldn't be left unwatched on such a night as this and in such a sea, and he was the fittest man to take charge of her. The steward had lighted the cabin lights, several of the men carried lanterns which they had brought from the forepeak, and others had drawn their sheath knives. There was plenty of illumination to show their villainous faces.

They were surprised to find me so prepared, and I gave them no time to recover.

"The first man," I hissed out, "that steps across that threshold without permission gets a bullet through him!"

"We mean you no harm, sir," spoke out one who seemed to be a ring-leader, a man rated as boat-swain's mate, whose name was Glibby.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, "in the cabin at this time of night?"

"Softly, softly, sir," replied Glibby.

"We are here to ask questions, not to answer 'em."

"What do you mean?" I cried.

"We are masters of the ship."

"Captain Matthews?"

"He will captain no more ships on this or any other seas," answered Glibby, with tranquil emphasis.

Now, it rose in my mind to shoot him then and there, murderous brute that he was. If I had been alone perhaps I would have done it without reckoning the consequences to myself, but I had another to think of. Unless craft stood me in good stead her case was hopeless. And had as Glibby was, Pimball was the chief villain.

"Serve him right!" I broke out with well simulated heat. "He deserves me and looks me up here just for stealing a kiss from a maid, and—"

"Spoken like a man of spirit, Mister Hampdon!" cried Glibby. "What did I tell ye, mates; he's with us!"

"With you?" said I, loosening my hold on the pistol, but taking good care to keep ready. "I am with you, all right. What do you propose? I am sick of the treatment I received, and—"

"We want that treasure for ourselves."

"And you shall have it, provided I get my share with the other men." I answered, scarcely startled by their words, for this I had expected.

"We will share and share alike in everything," answered Glibby. "Am I right, mates?"

"Right you are!" came from the deep voices of the men.

How I longed to clutch him by his throat and choke him! My temper rose again, but this time, as before, I managed to keep it down, but with immense difficulty, as you may suspect.

"Come into the cabin, Mister Hampdon," said Glibby, "and we will talk it over."

"Wait," said I. "Who is in command of you?"

"Why, Mister Pimball, the to'n'n," answered Glibby.

"Very good," said I. "I must talk with him about the future. Do you go on deck, Glibby, and send Pimball below, and be and I with the rest of you will soon settle this matter."

"All right," answered the boat-swain's mate, turning to the companionway. "Pimball can talk; him and you can come to terms. I make no doubt."

Now I couldn't allow myself to hesitate for the thousandth part of a second. Ostentatiously I shoved one pistol into the belt that hung at my right side, the other I dropped carelessly into the pocket of my coat, and as Glibby clattered up the ladder, I walked fearlessly, to all appearances, out of the berth and into the cabin, the men giving back respectfully enough to leave me gangway.

"Now, what is it that you propose, Master Bos'n?" I began, sitting down at the cabin table, while the rest ranged themselves about it, some standing, some sitting on the transoms at the sides, as Pimball came lumbering into the cabin.

"We know," began Pimball insolently, without further preliminaries, "that this ship's cruise for treasure. We know all we'll get out of the cruise is what we signed for an' nothin' else. We've made a good guess that the treasure is hereabouts, and we mean to have more than our wages. We're going to have our share of whatever's found that we're after."

"So you shall," I said, "I am with you in that. I want something more than my wages too."

"What's this woman anyway?" broke out another. "Why should she get it all? She's a mere girl."

"You have said right, mate; who and why indeed?" I answered smoothly, marking him down for my vengeance when my turn came. "Now, what are your plans?"

"We want that there map or chart that you have been seen readin' in your cabin," said Pimball.

It was in a little bag around my neck. I reached down, pulled out the bag, took the torn parchment from it and threw it on the table. There was not the least use in my pretending ignorance or in refusing to give it up. They could kill me and take it any way.

"There," said I coolly, "you have it." Pimball picked it up.

"I can make but little out of it," he said, and I doubted if he could read.

"You can at least see the latitude and longitude on it in the upper corners, can't you?" I asked, hardly suppressing my contempt for the man.

"Aye, that's plain enough," he answered dubiously.

"And you see that little wavy line that runs up from the lagoon over the top of what looks like a wall to an opening in the side?" I continued, determining suddenly to inflame their minds with the treasure so that they would give less heed to other things more important to me.

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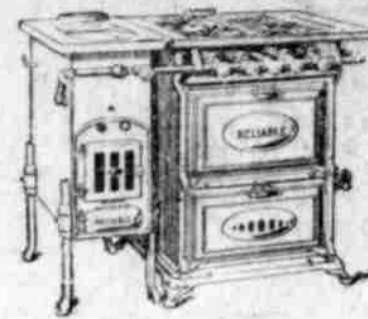
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COURT SUSPENDS SENTENCE

TUCSON — Dr. Hernandez Leon, who was arrested recently on the charge of practicing medicine without having obtained a license in this state, and who was held to the superior court, entered a plea of guilty in the superior court. Judge Cooper suspended sentence, it appearing that the doctor had unwittingly violated a state law.

K. OF C. CELEBRATION

TUCSON — A committee consisting of P. C. Gettins, Herman Kengla, and T. J. Ekfer was appointed at the meeting of the Knights of Columbus to arrange for the celebration of Columbus Day. A charity ball will be held Monday evening, October 13, and the other details of the celebration will be announced later.

HOLD FLOWER FESTIVAL

GLENDALE — Glendale is to have a flower festival on the 17th and 18th of October. The festival is being arranged by the Glendale Woman's club and the money derived therefrom will be used for the benefit of the club. The festival will be an outdoor affair, and thousands of roses and other flowers will be used.

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